

## Diamond Cut Diamond

By JANE BUNKER

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I think this disconcerted him more than anything I'd done.

"How long do you think you can keep me here?" I demanded.

"Zat depends on madame," he returned with a shrug and a significant glance at the shuttered windows.

"You speak as though you supposed nobody knew where I was."

"It is useless for you to call to Madame Delario—she will not come."

"I wasn't thinking of doing it. But my brother will come! He knows that I am here and he is coming for me. He was in my house when your message came. He had come over from Philadelphia with his lawyer and some papers for me to sign. When you told me Mrs. Delario was so ill, I waited for nothing—rushed down here as fast as I could. My brother and his lawyer were to follow me here in an hour and I am to go with them to the notary's to sign the papers. The hour is almost up!"

Monsieur bit his lips. Here was a contingency he hadn't reckoned with—that I had arranged to have some one call for me. Then a bright idea struck him. "Zat matter is simply arranged," said he with a wicked smile. "I tell your dear brother zat you have already gone home to him, and he will not wait."

I tried to laugh again, though I fear I made but a poor attempt at it, for I was beginning to be frightened. But I said: "Don't flatter yourself you could deceive my brother with a tale like that—he knows me too well. I told him I would wait and he knows I would keep my word. He would know the instant you said I had gone—he would know the minute he looked into your face—that something was wrong—here. In five minutes he'd be back with the police and break in the door."

This took the wind out of his sails for a minute. Then he rose to the situation in a masterful way; and I must say for him that he was no mean adversary. Drawing the key from his pocket he unlocked the door, saying, "And now madame will telephone her brother zat Madame Delario is dying and he is not to come today about ze important papers."

I saw my one chance lay in pretending I'd do it and then breaking loose; so I stepped out—he at my heels ready to grab me—and making a feint of going upstairs to the telephone, he followed suit by putting one foot on the lowest step. At that, I gave a loud, wild-western "whoopie!" right in his face, and punched him in the chest as hard as ever I could. He lost his balance, went rolling backward and sat down on the floor. Before he recovered from the shock of my unkindly behavior, I had bolted through the front door and reached the street.

### CHAPTER VII.

#### I See Through the Plot.

There are moments when I fairly thrill at the thought that I am an American citizen. Such a moment came after I had shot through the vestibule door and found myself in the complacent street. I was safe—safe—safe. I was where I could appeal to the first passing man to protect me in the name of American womanhood.

In the jubilation of my freedom and safety I stopped and looked back at the house. The holland shade was drawn downstairs, but as I looked, a finger—I knew it must be monsieur's—pulled an edge of the shade and an eye peeped at me.

I was in the midst of a grin of derision at him when my eye was caught by something at an upper window. It was a hand—a waving hand—a hand that said, "Go away—go away—go away!" as fast as it could, and said it to me.

An instant later I saw a face and recognized Mrs. Delario. Then the face was gone and the hand said, "Go away!" again and disappeared also.

Monsieur, seeing me standing, apparently interested in something happening upstairs, pulled the shade out a little farther. So what I did was deliberately to cross the street and signal him to raise the window.

"Raise the window—I want to speak to you!" I shouted.

The window was raised about six inches and monsieur put his evil, ratty face down to listen.

"Now do your darndest!" said I. And then I snapped my fingers at him and walked away.

Though it was early I began to feel hungry and I kept on till I reached a French restaurant where I generally lunch when I'm downtown. It was too soon for the music, but my own thoughts were music enough just then, and anyway I felt safe.

But by the time the salad came the reaction set in. The world turned drab, mottled with black responsibility and streaked with red indignation. I rob a young girl! Good heavens!—her father must be insane to bring such an accusation against me! I seen with her jewel case in my hands! Preposterous! And poor, poor Mrs. Delario—

she, too, had been accused, on top of all her trouble about her diamonds.

I had raised my coffee to my lips but hadn't tasted it, when the words went through my head like a shot: "CLAIRE'S JEWELS ARE MRS. DELARIO'S DIAMONDS!"

Mrs. Delario had sworn to me that they were hers. Had she robbed Claire coming over in the steamer? Impossible! She was too good a woman. But even so, how had monsieur connected me with them? Had she told him? That seemed impossible also; and yet I felt I'd really never shaken his conviction that I had them—and that he meant to get them by fair means or foul.

Clammy sweat broke out all over me as I thought of what he might do. He might have twenty accomplices—he evidently had money enough to play the game to a finish. Where could I go tonight? To a hotel? I didn't have any luggage. To a friend's house? I should have to explain—and I couldn't. I might go over to Philadelphia to my brother's but I didn't have money enough in my purse to pay my fare. And could I go off and leave the diamonds in my flat? Or could I take them with me, and perhaps be kidnapped, robbed and then murdered to keep my mouth shut! After what I'd seen of him I now felt him capable of anything.

With these thoughts I staggered out into the street. I noticed the clock as I passed—five minutes to eight, and I had come in at a quarter to six. I saw spies everywhere. I was afraid to go home and I didn't know what else to do. I knew I ought to communicate with Mrs. Delario, but I didn't dare—even to try to reach her on the telephone might make it the worse for her.

In this frame of mind I reached Broadway—here at least I felt tempo-



I Staggered Right Into the Arms of—Billy Rivers.

rarily safe—and staggered right into the arms of—Billy Rivers!

"Billy!" I cried, as soon as I saw who it was. "My rescuer!" For next to having a thick policeman to take care of me I'd rather have a thin reporter. Billy might not be able to save my life now, but he and his paper would at least avenge my death. "Billy, where are you going?"

"Just come. Left the matter at Clifton Springs this morning. Meeting you now is what you might call—"

"Finding your aunt from home," I suggested.

"Much better than any aunt I ever had," returned Billy gallantly; which didn't mean much, since all he had in the world was an only mother. He added: "Say—I was just thinking of you, too. I was coming up to see you and get some really, truly advice. While I was over there in Paris I sort of got the idea that I'd try my hand at the literary game."

"Don't!" I cut him short. "Stick to the daily news and live things—" I was at the moment thinking of the things I was living. Also that I was living so much I was afraid to go home! "Billy, take me to a show tonight—any old show."

He swung me into a hotel—I haven't the remotest idea which, for I had lost all sense of place—and was back in five minutes with tickets, and we went.

It was a musical show, and of all things in the world I detest a musical show about the most. Billy, however, seemed to find it to his liking, and commented on it freely—I remember his speaking of a miss at one end of the sextette as a "sweet bunch of petticoats" and I wondered what his mother would say to that. But the thing dragged along in its meaningless changes, and I sat there trying to find some coherence in its plot—or at least some gleam of real humor besides horseplay, and all the while there kept running through my head the words, "Your flat is being robbed—robbed—robbed!"

Billy and I came home on a local that dumped its passengers at One Hundred and Thirty-seventh, and I said, "Let's walk up," and pulled him out of the station and then into a side street and around a block until we were out of earshot of other pedestrians; then I said: "Billy, I've got a hunch that I've been robbed while we were at that show. You've got to come up with me."

"Aw, now—don't go worrying," he began soothingly. "Lots of people have hunches that never come to anything. But of course I'll go up with you—call the police afterward, too, if you want."

"Don't joke," I begged. "I've got five hundred dollars in the house—it would be just my luck." This was as good an explanation as any, and it was true. I didn't dare to tell him about the diamonds and my afternoon's adventure.

Billy whistled. "Good chance for me—if you haven't been burgled already. Three months in Paris for yours truly."

"Billy, listen," I begged, ignoring his attempt to be funny and cheer me up. "If George has gone off the elevator, all right—we walk up; but if George is still on—now listen, Billy, and play your part, for if I've been robbed George mustn't know it: if George is on I'll tell him you're from the office and have come up for some papers."

George has his virtues and the defects of his virtues—he keeps tab on everybody in the house, who their friends are, how often they call and how late they stay. For me—who never did such a thing—to bring an apple-cheeked young man to my flat after midnight would be nothing short of an adventure in George's eyes—a thing to be told through the house for a month of Sundays afterward. So I got out a quarter—to be ready with my thanks, in case he'd stayed on, waiting for me, as he often did; and there he was, smiling.

I slipped the quarter into his palm and told him how glad I was that I didn't have to walk up—and this gentleman, too, who "had come up from the office to get some papers"—I didn't say what office.

The car slid up—my heart slid down; monsieur was in that flat waiting for me and I knew it. Don't ask me to explain how I knew it—I knew it—and I knew that he was in the kitchen—or would be in the kitchen, when the car stopped at the sixth; that he meant to let me come in, close the door on myself, and then appear; that he had the kitchen window open ready to retreat by the fire-escape if I should happen not to come alone.

I say I knew this. At the same time I knew that I must give him the chance to get away—I must let him know I was not alone.

The car stopped. George asked if he should wait, and I replied, in a rather loud voice, that it might take some little time to find the papers for Mr. Rivers; better go down again, for the front door was still open and somebody might slip in. I fumbled with my key to let the car descend, and when the noise had grown faint, so that monsieur could hear every word I said, I opened the door a crack and held it while I drew out the key, saying, so the words would carry through the hall, "Billy, have you got a match? Won't you strike it before we go in—the flat is dark."

Billy struck a match and the kitchen door slammed as I opened the front door. I knew by that that the kitchen window was open.

The hall, by the outside gas jet, showed nothing out of the way—that had been rearranged to let me get inside and shut the door without suspicion. As to the rest of the flat!—monsieur fell me! It was literally turned inside out and upside down. Drawers had been emptied out on the floor, then piled up and refilled with other things to get them out of the way. Even the bookcases had been moved and searched behind and hundreds of books were heaped on the floor, helter-skelter. Pictures had been taken from the walls and pillow cushions cut open; actually, the breakfast food in boxes, the butter and food in the refrigerator had been searched.

And in the midst of the disorder one thing alone had apparently not been touched—the bunch of hyacinths! I saw it the moment I got the dining-room light turned on. There it stood on the table, just as I had left it when I had crowded the diamonds down among the stems. But were the diamonds there?

I was in the act of making a dash to find out, when I remembered Billy—Billy mustn't know.

He had ejaculated, "Love and potatoes! You did have a hunch!"

I pulled off my gloves—I must see if the diamonds were safe—just a touch with the end of my fingers and I'd know—

"I didn't do it with a hunch, Billy," said I, and I stooped to pick up a table drawer and slide it into place, for there was a considerable barricade between me and the hyacinths that were now out of my reach.

"I didn't suppose you did," Billy was generous enough to admit.

"I did it with a piece of unmitigated folly—" "Say—where did you leave the cash?" he questioned quickly, and I remembered the five hundred dollars that I'd forgotten for the moment.

I forgot the diamonds and sank into the nearest chair. I stammered, "Billy, I must know the worst, and I'm afraid to go to my bedroom and see if it's gone. It was in the bureau drawer."

Billy struck a match and went down the hall. Then I saw the electric light illuminate the doorway and heard Billy:

"Love and pumpkins! Come here—quick!"

I rushed after him, without waiting to see if the diamonds were safe. He pointed to the bed: "Will you look at that!"

All the bed covers had been thrown off and on the mattress lay the five hundred dollars, spread out in rows of tens and fives!

The sight fairly caved me in. It was a great deal worse than if the money had been stolen. The thought that instantly struck me, and Billy too, for Billy said it, was, "That fellow certainly had plenty of time, and what's more, I bet he was waiting for you."

"He was," said I with conviction,

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catching at the foot of the bed for support.

Billy gathered up and counted the money. It was all there, five hundred dollars.

"Now what—do you make—of that?" he meditated.

I knew what I made of it, but for Mrs. Delario's sake I did not tell Billy. He handed the bills to me.

"There's more to this," he observed. "Some mystery. I must search the other rooms."

"Listen!" I said.

We listened but heard nothing. Then he opened the bathroom door—nobody there. And with that he marched straight to the kitchen door and back to me in a flash.

"You open the front door and get ready to yell bloody murder if anything happens," he commanded.

"No, Billy," I returned, coming to my senses and pulling out my hatpin, "that had already once done duty that day. 'I'll get ready to do bloody murder.'"

He flung open the kitchen door and we went in together.

Our mysterious burglar had vanished.

"Flew the coop," said Billy sadly. "And I might have caught him if I'd been a minute sooner. Just my luck."

He pointed to the open window as he spoke.

To me that open window meant I had missed death because of Billy.

I swayed. He grabbed my arm and steered me to the dining room and berthed me in the chair I'd just left. "Get me a glass of water, Billy."

"Say, this is NEWS!" he chuckled, while I drank. "Mysterious robbery of well-known authoress—oh, I say, this is NEWS!"

He took the glass to the kitchen and came back with a notebook in his hand. I stumbled to my feet and got him by the shoulders.

"Billy Rivers, this is not news! It's life and death. Not a living soul must know of this till I tell it. Do you understand?"

"Well, but," he began, "a robbery like this—and of you—"

"It wasn't a robbery."

"Wasn't a robbery?" He cast a glance over the wreckage strewn all over. "What was it, then?"

"A search."

"Gee whiz! I believe you're right," he cried, looking about again, with a new light in his eyes.

"I say—the plot thickens! This is a real mystery!"

"Don't you see why it mustn't be known?"

"And do you know who searched and what he searched for?"

"I think so."

Billy stared at me for some seconds before he brought out, "I believe you know more about this than you're telling me. You're concealing something. Well—tell me this—did he get it?"

"I don't know."

Billy whistled and stared. "Say—this begins to be romantic."

"Romantic!" I snorted. "You don't know what romantic is!"

I managed to stop there. However much I respected Billy in general, I hadn't much confidence in his discretion.

"Billy, do you remember the time your mother put on your brand-new Fauntleroy suit and told you not to go to the swimming hole and you went?" I asked desperately, trying to get at him somehow and bind him to a promise to keep this to himself.

"And you went—and the boys threw you in, sash and curls and all? And I found you and took you home and ironed you and curled you up fresh and saved you from—"

"A lickin'—and a good one," he finished for me. "Those were the natter's lickin' days—before she lost the girls. And it wasn't the only lickin' you saved me from," he added, in the grateful way I'd always loved him for, even when I just couldn't love him, he was so bad.

"Billy, dear," I said, pressing my hands on his shoulders, "it's your turn now. Do you understand?—and you've got to forget that you're a reporter and remember only that you're my friend and that I need one; for I'm in a lot of trouble and I simply can't explain."

"Don't say any more," said Billy with a fine air, taking up his hat. I remembered then that he had come for papers—George would be looking for some evidence of my truthfulness—and I snatched up the first sizable book I saw—my German dictionary, though I didn't notice what it was—and a bunch of odd papers and thrust them into Billy's hand and got him out and George up in spite of protests that I ought not to stay alone after that.

I closed the door and put up the chain-bolt, and seeing my clothes all in a heap, went in and hung them up and threw the blankets on the bed. I turned out all the lights but one. And throughout all these operations I kept asking myself, "Did he get the diamonds?"

(To Be Continued)

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### Tied to Type.

"Nobody wants me except as a villain. I represent a type, but I'm tired of villain parts." "You're benevolent alongside of me," said the movie actress. "Nobody wants me except as the cruel superintendent of orphan asylums."

### Delayed Decision.

"Senator Twobble says he is retiring to private life for the sake of his family."

"Umph!"

"Maybe he's sincere."

"I doubt it. He managed to put his family by for twenty years."